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# Royal Palms Resort general manager stays on top of details to keep four-diamond getaway on par

Phoenix Business Journal - by [Lynn Ducey](#)

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On any given day, a tall, dark-suited man can be seen walking the stone pathways of the **Royal Palms Resort** and Spa. And while it could easily be a Secret Service agent scouting the property in preparation for another visit by President George W. Bush, it's more likely General Manager Pete Ells.

Ells walks the grounds of the 119-room resort almost hourly, going to meetings, greeting guests or checking the myriad details that it takes to keep the four-diamond resort on par.

"I usually get here at about 7 a.m. That gives me time to catch my breath and take a look at

my day. By 8, everything is hopping," he says.

At the Royal Palms, Ells manages an operating budget of more than \$30 million and a staff of more than 325. He oversees all of the



Jim Poulin/Phoenix Business Journal

As general manager of the Royal Palms Resort and Spa, Pete Ells oversees an operating budget of more than \$30 million and a staff of more than 325. He also

resort's amenities: the acclaimed T. Cook's restaurant, catering, group events, guest satisfaction and services, and overall maintenance of the rooms and 9-acre grounds, with 22 fountains, 12 outdoor fireplaces and much more.

served as general manager of the Ritz-Carlton Phoenix for several years.

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"We've got four weddings this weekend, and that's pretty typical," says Ells, pointing out hotel employees setting up rows of white folding chairs in the Alegria Garden, one of the romantic spots used for ceremonies at the resort.

Ells arrived at the Royal Palms this past summer, but he is a long-standing member of the Valley's hospitality community. He was general manager of The Ritz-Carlton Phoenix for several years before being promoted in 2006 to general manager of The Ritz-Carlton in Half Moon Bay, just south of San Francisco.

"I can't tell you how happy I was to hear that Pete was coming back to town," says Debbie Johnson, president and CEO of the **Arizona Hotel & Lodging Association**, who has known and worked with Ells for years.

"He is one of those guys who thinks before speaking, and when he says something, it's very meaningful," she says. "I have made sure to get him back involved in the AZHLA."

Ells doesn't get much chance to take advantage of the resort's food, treat himself to a massage or relax poolside, gazing at a close-up view of Camelback Mountain.

"Everybody thinks that's what a GM does," Ells says as he walks through the meandering pathways at a crisp clip.

He seeks relaxation elsewhere, keeping up his golf game with friends every weekend. A college golfer who played at James Madison University, he practices as much as he can.

"We have a regular group of about eight of us that play on Saturdays," he says. "We are the first ones out at 7:30. That's kind of my stress release."

Ells managed to get in a game or two on both courses in Half Moon Bay, breathtaking links by any standards, and says he would love to play golf around the world if he could.

"To play Augusta National would be a life goal. It's incredibly exclusive. I have played Pebble Beach and Cypress Point," he says, mentioning two top courses in Monterey, Calif.

Last summer, Ells left his clubs for the water, taking a boating vacation with his family in the Caribbean. While he doesn't have much time for it, he says he enjoys reading and tries to squeeze books into his business trips. He also loves basketball and has season tickets to the Phoenix Suns.

Both of his boys are away at college — Virginia Tech and the University of Arizona — and Ells is a big fan of NCAA basketball and looks forward to the spring tournament season every year.

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He's definitely a people person, but he's also a staunch professional — a trait the Royal Palms is known for, and part of the reason it is a favorite among visiting dignitaries and celebrities.

"We are very protective of their identities," Ells says. "We never disclose who stays here, so our guests feel they can really get away and get some needed down time."

Meanwhile, as he walks through the historic grounds, he points out the History Wall, which tells of the resort's construction as a residence by Delos Cooke in the 1920s and its transformation into the Royal Palms Inn in the 1940s.

"This area of the resort includes 16 designer casitas. Every room has a different color scheme, a different theme," Ells says as he takes a quick turn and walks through a set of gates. "Be careful, you can get lost."

#### **Profile: Pete Ells**

Title: General manager

Company: Royal Palms Resort and Spa

Age: 48

Spouse: Gayle

Children: Matt, 22; Tyler, 19; Courtney, 17

Residence: Scottsdale

Education: James Madison University

Associations: Board member, Arizona Hospitality & Lodging Association; incoming board member, Valley Hotel & Resort Association

#### **Q&A**

When you were a teen, what did you think you'd be when you grew up: "A pro golfer."

What channel is your radio tuned to, and what is in your CD player: "KMLE Country 108. I've got Sugarland in my CD player."

Your dream vacation: "Anywhere with a golf course and a beach."

The last thing you read that genuinely excited you: "'Relationship Economics,' by David Nour."

If you could memorize one book cover to cover, what would it be: "'Good to Great,' by Jim Collins."

Your must-see sporting event: "The Masters."

Your favorite place at home: "Sitting on the back patio relaxing with a glass of wine."

Your pet peeve: "Bad attitudes."

What do you know about life that you wish you had known 10-20 years ago: "Life is not getting what you want, but wanting what you've got, so enjoy the moment."

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Most important thing you look for in your job: "An opportunity to impact people, whether it's employees or guests."

If you could live a double life, what would the other be: "I would be a real estate agent and a high school golf coach."

Your favorite quote: "Hope is not a strategy."

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